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AUTHOR	Sorrells, Susan J.
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ABSTRACT

Planning for postsecondary education and the choice of the right college program are discussed to assist disabled high school students and disabled persons who are thinking about returning to school. Considerations before making a college choice are identified, including whether the student: has a high school diploma or equivalent, meets college entrance requirements, takes admission tests, has accommodations for admission to vocational technical schools or technical institutes, and obtains advice from the high school guidance counselor. The following programs are described: four-year colleges and universities, junior and community colleges, vocational technical schools, technical institutes, trade schools, home study, adult basic education, and continuing education. Information on these programs includes: funding, courses of study or special interests that should be considered in selecting a school, admission requirements, special services for handicapped students, and licensing and accreditation of vocational/technical schools and home study programs. The differences among vocational/technical schools, technical institutions, and trade schools are identified. (SW)

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FACT SHEET: EDUCATION BEYOND HIGH SCHOOL--THE CHOICE IS YOURS!

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FACT SHEET: EDUCATION BEYOND HIGH SCHOOL— THE CHOICE IS YOURS!

There are different times in life when we are faced with decisions about furthering our education. In high school most of us wonder what the next step should be. Later, we may think about returning to school to upgrade our skills or make a career change. The onset of a disability may require training for new skills. Those of us who did not finish high school may decide later that a high school diploma or additional training would be useful.

Planning for postsecondary education is a challenge. In order to make sound decisions—and to select a program that suits each of us best—it is important to know what our choices are. There are many different kinds of programs offered at the postsecondary level. Everyone has similar options; they are no different for people with handicaps.

In recent years, as colleges and other postsecondary programs have become more available to disabled students, an increasing number have taken advantage of these new opportunities. In fact, many schools now have a special office to help disabled students find the services they require.

Listed below are descriptions of programs that exist within the postsecondary educational system and some things to consider before making choices. No one program is right for all people. Consider each one based upon your interests, your needs, your career goals and your qualifications. Good luck, and remember, it is your own careful planning, resourcefulness and determination that will help to bring about a rewarding experience.

Things to Think About Before You Make a Choice

• Do you have a high school diploma or the equivalent? This is required by most colleges and many (though not *all*) other postsecondary programs.

• Look carefully at entrance requirements. Some colleges are very selective and require good grades and high test scores. Entrance requirements may be less selective at other institutions. If you prefer to go on to learn work skills and prepare for a job right after high school, you will need to find out about admissions requirements at postsecondary vocational-technical programs.

• Some schools require admissions tests. The most commonly used are the SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) and the ACT (American College Testing) Assessment. Find out which test is required by the college to which you wish to apply. Ask your high school guidance counselor where and when such tests will be given. If you require special accommodations for taking admissions tests—such as a reader, an interpreter, or extended time—talk to your guidance counselor. Each of the two testing services which administer the admissions tests has information available about testing students with special needs. You may write to ATP; Services for Handicapped Students, Institutional Services, Box 592, Princeton, New Jersey 08541 for details of the SAT. The American College Testing address is ACT Assessment, "Special Testing Guide," Test Administration, P.O. Box 168, Iowa City, IA 52243.

• Accommodations can also be made for admission to vocational technical schools or technical institutes so that tests evaluate your abilities fairly.

• Your high school guidance counselor is a good source for obtaining information about specific schools. Your school or local library probably will have directories that describe colleges and vocational technical schools.

FOUR-YEAR COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

After successful completion of four years of work at a college or an undergraduate program of a university, you will earn a Bachelor's degree. You should have, by that time, a good background in your major field of study as well as an understanding of a wide variety of subjects. Colleges and universities are similar in many ways, but frequently the difference between them is that of emphasis. Generally colleges are smaller and may not offer as wide a variety of courses as a university. Universities, because of the presence of professional and graduate schools, usu-

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ally have a broader diversity within the student body and offer a wider variety of courses than a college can. Colleges, because of their size and concentration on needs of undergraduate students, tend to have a more personal and intimate atmosphere than universities. There are many exceptions to these generalizations. It is best to examine a variety of campuses before making a choice.

Here Are Some Other Points To Keep in Mind:

- Colleges and universities are supported by either public or private funds. The tuition at the "publics" is less costly to you because most costs are covered by tax funds. Your state university or state college are examples of publicly run schools. Private institutions are supported through endowment funds, gifts, and government aid. The amount of these funds varies; tuition tends to be higher than that of a public institution.

- Different colleges and univeristies may be recognized for particularly good courses of study offered through specific departments. If you are aware of your interests, and have decided on a field in which you would like to major (such as foreign languages, economics), then you should examine that department within the various schools you are investigating. How good is their program?

- There are a number of colleges geared to special areas of interest such as the Julliard School of Music or the Rhode Island School of Design. These schools are highly selective; students usually must show talent and proficiency. Although intensive study is provided in speciality areas, course offerings in other subjects are often limited. Other schools may specialize in technical areas such as engineering, business or architecture. Again, there is a heavy concentration of courses geared to the specialty area.

- Other types of specialty schools are those which are geared to students with specific disabilities. For example, Gallaudet College in Washington, DC is primarily for students with hearing losses.

JUNIOR AND COMMUNITY COLLEGES

These two year colleges provide you with another alternative which may suit your needs. They offer a variety of courses which, upon successful completion of the work, may lead to either a Certificate or Associate's degree.

Junior colleges are most often privately supported postsecondary institutions offering an Associate of Arts (A.A.) degree. The majority of them provide programs in the liberal arts field. Their primary purpose is to serve students who are not quite ready to take on the complexities of the four-year college and university system. Junior colleges provide additional preparation time and help students transfer to a four-year institution after receiving their degree.

Community colleges have grown rapidly over the past few decades. They are far more prevalent than junior colleges. Since many of them are new, they tend to have fewer physical barriers and their campuses have been designed so that students with mobility impairments can move about and use facilities with ease. Many additional services for students with all types of disabilities are likely to be available.

Community Colleges Have These Features:

- They are publicly funded, and have either no or low-cost tuition.

- They offer a wider range of programs than junior colleges. Many provide courses of study in the liberal arts and provide students with the opportunity to transfer to a four-year school. They also frequently offer vocational and occupational programs. It is possible to graduate with a Certificate and a useable job skill. Students may prepare themselves for occupations such as computer programmers, X-ray or marketing technicians, auto mechanics, secretaries and dental assistants.

- They exist in or near many communities; it is not usually necessary to move away from home in order to attend.

- Generally, the only admissions requirement is a high school diploma or its equivalent.

- Because a greater number of disabled students are participating in these programs, many community colleges have become "experts" in finding ways to meet the special needs of students with handicaps.

VOCATIONAL TECHNICAL SCHOOLS, TECHNICAL INSTITUTES AND TRADE SCHOOLS

While these types of programs differ in certain respects, they are all designed to prepare students for gainful employment in recognized occupations. Skill training in specific fields or increasing the level of skills you've already achieved are at the heart of these occupational programs. A course of study may take anywhere from two weeks to two years to complete. This will depend upon the nature and difficulty of the skill area. For example, learning to be a veterinarian assistant technician can take up to a year and a half, but a program in dog grooming only requires eight weeks. Certificates are generally earned by students who complete a full program of

study. Further work may be needed in some fields in order to be licensed. For instance, most states require that cosmetologists pass a written exam to receive a license before they can begin work.

Most of these schools have an open enrollment policy, which means that the major requirement for admissions is a desire to learn. Some of the private trade and technical schools require a high school diploma or GED credential. However, work experience, without a diploma, can sometimes meet requirements for enrollment.

What Are the Differences Among These Schools?

- **Vocational-Technical Schools** offer a wide variety of occupational programs. You can be trained for a number of jobs in such fields as construction, marketing, office occupations, health and food services. These schools are usually publicly supported, and therefore, are relatively inexpensive.

- **Technical Institutions** are usually two-year institutions. Instruction is offered in the technologies (e.g. medical assistants, computer programming, industrial technology), at a level above the skilled trades and below the professional level.

- **Trade Schools** provide training in one trade or craft or different skills or crafts within one occupational group. You may have noticed the ads on TV for diesel mechanics programs, truck driving schools or radio broadcasting. These are all examples of trade schools.

Things To Check Out About Vocational Technical, Technical Schools and Trade Schools

- What are the admissions requirements? Do you need to have a certain reading or math level, or pass an entrance exam?

- What are your interests? Will jobs be available in your area after you've received training? If not, are you willing to move to where the jobs are? Will the school help you find employment?

- Is the school licensed by your state's postsecondary school licensing bureau? Most states require a license, but a few do not. You can find this information in the school's catalogue.

- Is the school accredited? This is important. It means that the school has passed a thorough examination by an accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. The school is evaluated in such areas as educational quality and teaching ability.

- Does the school make use of laboratories or shops so that most of the training takes place in a setting which resembles the real work environment?

- Is there anyone in the program who can help make accommodations for your specific needs?

HOME STUDY

Home study provides you with an opportunity to learn a skill or earn an academic degree at your own pace, at home. This is also referred to as correspondence instruction. Many of the courses offered provide complete vocational training in areas such as advertising, drafting, jewelrey design and piano tuning. There are also programs that can prepare you for a high school diploma or a bachelor's degree. Certain courses of instruction may be highly specialized, such as those which are offered in braille or Spanish.

The materials are prepared in a sequential, logical order. When each lesson is completed, the student mails the assigned work to the school for correction, comments and grading. The assignments are then mailed back to the student with the next lesson.

The length of the course varies, according to the subject matter and the school itself. Some courses of study may only take a few weeks to complete, while others may require three to four years of intensive study.

If home study seems "right" for you, make sure the school has been accredited by the National Home Study Council. A directory of accredited schools is included in this packet.

ADULT EDUCATION

Adult Education programs are designed to provide instruction below college level to any person sixteen years of age or older who no longer is being served by the public education system.

There are many different kinds of programs and courses available, and you can find them in a variety of settings, including neighborhood high schools, community centers, or on university and community college campuses. Generally, these programs are held in the evenings or on weekends so that people who work can participate. The cost of tuition varies. Many courses are offered free of charge, while others may require a relatively low registration fee.

The range of programs referred to as adult education is vast. Some examples are:

- **Adult Basic Education** offers programs in basic reading and math skills, courses to prepare you for the GED tests (which can qualify you for a high school equivalency credential) and English as a Second Language Program (ESL). Special accommodations for taking the GED course or test can be arranged for

you, if you need them. Check with your local board of education, or your State Director of Adult Education to get more information on these accommodations and on the programs themselves.

- **Continuing Education Programs** may be offered through your local board of education, your local department of recreation or nearby community college. The course selection is extremely varied and can differ in each location. You may choose from among instruction in basic academic skills to those designed to upgrade your employment or employability skills (e.g. business management, typing, real estate). Many courses, such as parenting, camping survival skills, or flower arrranging are offered purely for enjoyment or enrichment. Courses are generally non-graded and non-credit. Often you will receive a schedule of classes in the mail from the sources that provide these opportunities. Local radio stations may announce registration dates and locations for new sessions. Your local library may also keep a schedule of classes on hand.

The options are extensive; making the right choice may seem difficult. Some people may try out a couple of programs before they find the one that "fits." Others select a new program as their needs and interests change. We hope your first option works for you—but remember, you always have a choice.

Text by Susan J. Sorrells, August 1981

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